

# EXHIBIT Q

**DECLARATION OF SARA CHURGIN**

I, Sara Churgin, declare as follows:

1. I am District Manager of the Eastern Rhode Island Conservation District (ERICD). We were established by state statute in 1944, and ERICD has been a 501(c)(3) organization since 2019. ERICD has five full-time and one part-time staff.

2. We're one of three conservation districts here in Rhode Island. There are more than 3,000 across the country.

3. Conservation districts were established to help farmers through the hardships they faced as a result of the Dust Bowl. Today, seventy-five percent of our clientele are still farmers.

4. We help with the conservation of prime farmland so that we can make sure that our farmers can keep the family farms their families have worked for decades, and even centuries, and make sure our communities can have local food from local farmers.

5. We also provide financial and technical assistance to farmers and other landowners. Imagine a beginning farmer who just got a piece of property and doesn't know what to do with it. We can help, for example, by doing soil testing and working with them on how to care for and get the best out of their land.

6. We're a free resource for practical knowledge to get started or for problems that will come up even with experienced farmers. We advise on best management practices. Anybody who comes to me or calls me about a natural resource concern, I direct them to get the help they need.

7. We also work with local municipalities and do outreach education in schools, teaching children about taking care of the land for future generations. We help run the Portsmouth AgInnovation Farm, a sustainable farm that includes an afterschool and camp program. We also work to help develop best management practices for soil and water conservation and teach those to landowners.

8. We're heavily reliant on federal grants to continue to operate and provide the services we do. But right now, we have two major grants we can't access.

9. One comes from the EPA. It's a Community Change Grant funded through the Inflation Reduction Act. The [REDACTED] received a \$[REDACTED] grant from EPA through that program, and we are a subrecipient through them. We were set to receive \$349,077.

10. That money was set to address food waste in Rhode Island. We planned to use it to fund education and outreach efforts to reduce food waste and its negative impacts on the environment. Those efforts were going to include setting up the first municipal composting site in Rhode Island. Presently, there are none. That would be a really significant step and an opportunity for education and better resource management that might not happen now.

11. That's because the grant has been frozen off and on for weeks. The [REDACTED] hasn't been able to access those funds reliably through the online portal that grantees use to seek payment on open awards from EPA. As a result, they've had to instruct us to stop work. We don't have the reserve to work without being paid or knowing we'll be paid in the future. We're such a tiny

organization. We don't have a big donor base or anything like that. We haven't been able to carry out the work we planned with those funds.

12. We also have a five-year USDA grant that is also funded by the IRA. We're a subrecipient of that through the Rhode Island Association of Conservation Districts. Each conservation district was able to hire one full-time staff member to work on this agreement.

13. The continued money for that grant is to help develop smart agriculture practices for our landowners, which means using technology and data to help them grow more efficiently and sustainably. The freeze on funding has meant we are no longer to work on this agreement and provide the needed support to our community.

14. The grant has been completely frozen since late January. Not being able to continue work on this contract has significantly limited the work we are able to do. We have had to very quickly shift staff around to other agreements, which is seriously stretching ERICD's resources. This is causing irreparable harm to the organization.

15. Without being able to access this federal funding, I'm going to have to let someone go, or definitely do a reorganization. I won't be able to keep four staff members plus myself. Unless things change and we can regain access to these funds for our work, I can probably go for two pay periods, which is a month, before needing to let someone go. That's no time at all. And if there's a shutdown, that only makes it worse because then we know we're going to have to go longer without access to our funding.

16. Our community suffers too. The farmers are already suffering because a lot of the USDA payments for cost-share that farmers have to front aren't being reimbursed. And then, with all that suffering already going on, we're not going to be able to be there to help them with anything. Farmers count on us for programs we aren't going to be able to provide because these grants are locked. That resource will just not be there for farmers.

17. We've been in existence so long. If we have to shut down, it means the loss of so many services that people here rely on. Besides our work on farm practices, we work on emergency watershed protection. We work with the municipalities on programs to address flooding. If we had a hurricane tomorrow, I don't know if we'd be able to help people rebuild if we aren't able to operate.

I declare under penalty of perjury that the foregoing is true and correct.

Executed on March 13, 2025.

*sara churgin*  
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Sara Churgin